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THE JAPANESE PRESS AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CONTROL

The Japanese press is a powerful instrument for social and political control. Through its assumption of a role in the lives of the Japanese people in which it not only guided their knowledge of world events but also molded their cultural tastes and in part directed their social affairs, the press in Japan has exerted strong influence over the population. To exploit this instrument of control to the utmost, the Japanese Government, particularly since 1942, has centralized both newspaper management and government supervision.

Through the combination of extremely wide circulation, broad range of interests, and modern, efficient methods of publication, the Japanese newspaper achieves a far-reaching and intimate influence upon the Japanese people. Enormous circulations are made possible in part by the fact that nearly 99 percent of the people can read newspapers and magazines. The range of the Japanese newspaper's interest extends not only to printing issues in Braille and publishing simplified editions for children but also to matters completely outside the realm of publication. Each of the large daily newspapers, through its "enterprise" bureau, has undertaken such projects as welfare work, scientific expeditions, meteorological observations, agricultural experiments, and aeronautical demonstrations. In its methods of obtaining, transmitting, publishing, and distributing news the Japanese newspaper is nearly as efficient as its counterpart in the United States.

The Japanese press has not shown an equivalent zeal for accuracy in presenting the news. When complete facts are missing, reporters and desk men round out their reports with whatever fiction will appeal to their readers, and they also try to meet their readers' demand for rumor and gossip. Together with the absence of national libel laws, this disregard for accuracy has established a tradition of yellow journalism which has made the Japanese press especially pliable to the wartime demands of the Japanese Government. Newspapermen have not been reluctant to print long, detailed accounts of nonexistent naval battles or to treat factually the propaganda themes their Government has evolved.

The measures taken by the Japanese Government to secure control of this efficient and adaptable medium have been of three kinds: negative censorship, centralization of newspapers, and centralization of the sources of news.

The first of these controls has always been a part of Japanese journalism. The original press laws antedate the Japanese Constitution of 1889.

The press has also long been restrained by the peace preservation and thought control measures which provide that no treasonable or communistic ideas may be presented, and that nothing may be said which might alienate the people from the military. Wartime control legislation has been considerably more restrictive, but the principle of telling the press what must *not* be printed instead of what *must* be printed has been retained. Although there has been a tacit understanding since 1937 that militarism and nationalism should be made attractive, the Japanese press has not been obliged to disseminate any particular ideology, and within the limits of wartime security has been relatively free to criticize government policy.

To implement this negative censorship the Japanese Government has set up a system of licensing, press bans, confiscation and suspension of publications, and fines and imprisonment for editors. Most of these restraints are at present administered by the Bureau of Information which also directs general press policy. For printing information prohibited by a news ban, a Japanese publisher faces, in addition to the revocation of his license, the possibility of confiscation of the offending issues, the complete suspension of all his publications in addition to his newspaper, or the fining and jailing of his editor. Furthermore, he may be forced to forfeit the 2,000 yen of guarantee money that all publications dealing with current events are obliged to post. Because of these severe penalties, Japanese newspapermen frequently practice voluntary prepublication censorship, submitting material to the Bureau of Information for approval in advance of its publication.

Although press bans may be issued on any piece of information the Japanese Government wishes to withhold, the material most frequently banned is that which is termed "inimical to public peace and order." Bans are also placed on material which is thought to fall into one of the following four categories: information that may obstruct foreign diplomatic relations; information that may threaten national security; information that may obstruct the carrying out of economic policies; information that may threaten the security of military affairs. Bans may be issued by the Home Ministry, the War Ministry, the Navy Ministry, and the Foreign Ministry, and are generally released over the signature of the local police chief.

The Japanese Government began to centralize newspaper production shortly after war began in China in 1937. Between 1937 and 1943 the number of daily newspapers was reduced from over 1,000 to less than 200. Furthermore, in 1942 the large metropolitan newspapers were forced by government decree to merge with one another, reducing the number of daily newspapers in Tokyo to one-fourth of the prewar number. Many of the smaller provincial newspapers went out of business at that time through shortage of newsprint, and their communities were then served by the larger newspapers. Although the newsprint shortage was announced as the main reason for the forced merger, the tightening of government supervision was clearly a desired result. In line with this

policy of increased centralization, the Japan Press Association was established in 1942 as a government control organization, and early in 1945 was succeeded by the Japan Press Corporation. It supervises the registration of newspapermen, the distribution of newspapers and other publications, and the allotment of newsprint and other materials.

The centralization of news sources was largely achieved through the forced merger in 1936 of the two leading news agencies, *Rengo* and *Nippon Dempo,* to form *Domei.* The formation of this monopoly increased the inaccuracy traditional to Japanese journalism. Newspapers had previously subscribed to both the leading news services and had printed conflicting versions of the same event side by side, thus allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. With *Domei* as the only Japanese news service, even this check on accuracy was removed. Some Japanese newspapers, resisting this action by the Government, sought to avoid using *Domei* by relying to a greater extent upon their own correspondents and by establishing agreements with the American news services and the *New York Times* and the *London Times.* Since 1942, of course, these agreements have been abrogated. Except for a handful of foreign correspondents *Domei* has become, as the Japanese Government intended, virtually the only source of outside news. This centralization of news sources, along with the establishment of controls over subject matter and the centralization of newspaper production, completed the shaping of an instrument of social and political control which, whether used by the Japanese Government in prosecuting the war or by an Allied Military Government in restoring peacetime order, has few equals in comprehensiveness or efficiency.